

ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND CONSERVATION
BLOCK GRANT (EECBG) PROGRAM

Key Activities Summary

Blueprint 3B: Community Solar

This Key Activities Summary provides a concise overview of the **Community Solar Blueprint**. DOE plans to provide technical assistance support to all entities who select this Blueprint, which may include one-on-one attention from DOE or national lab experts, webinars, and peer learning opportunities.



INTRODUCTION

What

EECBG Program grantees can facilitate the creation of a solar project, or set of projects, that shares its benefits across multiple customers. Community solar projects vary in size, customer type, and business model, and have the unifying characteristics of allowing multiple customers to “subscribe” to receive a portion of the energy generated by a specific solar installation at billing rates associated with that project. Community solar projects can go on rooftops (for example, a condominium or apartment building) or can be larger scale and offsite (such as parking lots, brownfield sites, and landfills). Note, the solar project must be located within the same electric utility territory as its subscribers. State, local, and tribal governments can engage in community solar development in several ways, including hosting a project on government property, helping to spread the word to potential customers, and helping to identify and overcome local barriers to community solar development, including siting and permitting.



Justice and Equity

Community solar can provide clean energy access and utility bill savings to renters, businesses, and others who don't have the option to go solar on their own rooftops.

The [DOE National Community Solar Partnership](#) has identified [five meaningful benefits of equitable community solar](#). Requests for proposals to community solar developers can also be developed to include preferences for low-to-moderate income (LMI) subscribers, local and women- and minority-owned small businesses.



Source: [National Community Solar Partnership](#)

Why

Community solar can benefit most American businesses and residents, including renters and homeowners who do not have access to a solar-ready roof or the upfront capital to install rooftop solar. Community solar is a great way to lower energy bills and greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) while supporting local job creation, access to clean energy for low- to moderate-income households, regional resilience, and opportunities for community ownership and wealth-building. Governments can play a powerful role in enabling community solar, including helping with siting, zoning, permitting, inspection, and customer education and engagement.

Community solar projects have the potential to lower energy burdens of low-income residents, create more resilient power grids, and invest in community wealth building opportunities. For communities with high household and business rental rates or portions of the population on fixed incomes, community solar is a good alternative to promoting on-site solar systems because it does not require investment in or ownership of the property.

Meaningful Benefits of Community Solar



GREATER HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS

- Provide a reduction in electricity bills for residential subscribers to a project



LMI HOUSEHOLD ACCESS

- Include subscribers from low- to moderate-income (LMI) households



RESILIENCE AND GRID BENEFITS

- Include the capability to deliver power to households and/or critical facilities during a grid outage or strengthen grid operations



COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

- Local community members, subscribers, or local community organizations own or have equity in the project
- Other wealth-building strategies



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Advance high wages
- Reduce income disparities across race and gender
- Ensure a trained and available workforce reflective of the project community

Five Meaningful Benefits of Equitable Community Solar. Source:
[U.S. Department of Energy, National Community Solar Partnership](#)

Key Activities

These selected Key Activities are suggestions of important steps a government could take to begin or make progress on their community solar journey. EECBG Program awardees that utilize a blueprint will receive expedited application review from DOE. Applicants must execute at least one of the key activities listed under each selected blueprint but should avoid going beyond the recommended activities. Going beyond these key activities may trigger additional reviews of your EECBG Program project to ensure you're meeting National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), historic preservation, and/or other federal regulations. While each step is important, they should be seen as a guide. Awardees should determine their own priority activities based on their local context.

- 1 **Stakeholder Engagement, Education, and Outreach**
- 2 **Site Assessment and Selection**
- 3 **Procurement of Developer, Legal, and Technical Support**
- 4 **Communications, Program Education, and Promotion**
- 5 **Installation of Solar Panels**

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Stakeholder Engagement, Education, and Outreach

All successful community solar projects need proactive engagement with community members, stakeholders, and potential subscribers. Governments can work together with solar developers to provide strong outreach and education across their communities.

- » Engage your electric utility early.
- » To inform your engagement efforts, confirm regulatory allowance for community solar projects, any applicable rate structures, or program requirements, and who will be the project lead/administrator and responsible for coordinating subscriptions and billing.

Key Resource

[General Guidance for Justice40 Implementation](#), section 6 “Formulating a Stakeholder Engagement Plan”

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Site Assessment and Selection

The government can help identify and evaluate potential sites for community solar projects, including on government-owned rooftops and parking lots, brownfield sites, or privately-owned but under-utilized sites. Solar project developers may also be able to provide a short list of potential sites based on solar power generating potential and approximated development costs that could then be further evaluated.

The information from these assessments can be collaboratively shared with community solar project developers who are interested in local projects and as part of the procurement process.

» Cost estimate: \$2,000 - \$5,000 per site evaluation.

Key Resource

For example, [Cook County, Illinois's Department of Environment and Sustainability](#) identified 5-7 sites for potential community solar projects.

KEY ACTIVITIES

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Procurement of Developer, Legal, and Technical Support

The government can run a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to select qualified community solar developer(s). The government can lead this step or seek out a partner to lead the procurement process as described in the Blueprint 3C: Solarize Campaign example.

» Cost estimate: \$25,000-\$100,000 for technical support and staff time to manage the procurement process.

Key Resource

Review the [Meaningful Benefits for Equitable Community Solar](#) and incorporate applicable criteria into your RFP process.

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KEY ACTIVITIES

Communications, Program Education, and Promotion

Enlisting subscribers to the program will require communications, program promotion, and education about the benefits of participating, as well as the exact steps and terms of participation.

Cost estimates for these activities include:

- » Advertising and public education: \$10,000 - \$75,000
- » Website development: \$5,000 - \$15,000

Key Resource

Best Practices Guide for Inclusive Solar Energy Communications (DOE): Resources and examples to inform your engagement – particularly to underserved communities – about solar power.

Key Resource

Community Solar 101 (NREL): An overview of community solar deployment, including three business model structures and information about how to connect community solar with low-to-moderate income (LMI) customers.

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KEY ACTIVITIES

Installation of Solar Panels

(Limited to projects less than or equal to 60kW)

EECBG Program awardees may expect an expedited review of their applications if focusing on this blueprint's key activities related to stakeholder engagement, site assessment, and/or communications. Awardees pursuing construction and installation of the community solar arrays, should confirm DOE approval of their plan prior to proceeding, and should consider the following:

- » Rooftop projects: EECBG Program funds can be used for the construction of rooftop community solar projects so long as they comply with the state's historic preservation programmatic agreement (often abbreviated to "PA") and fall within a NEPA bounded category.
- » Ground-mounted projects: Ground-mounted solar projects up to 60kW may receive an expedited review. Using EECBG Program funds to support construction of larger community solar projects (over 60kW) is permitted; however, awardees should expect a longer review and additional forms to complete.

NOTE: Further restrictions are listed on page 39 of the [Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant \(EECBG\) Program Formula Grant Application Instructions](#) and in the [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\) and Historical Preservation Considerations](#).

Questions? Ask your EECBG Program point of contact or email us at EECBG@hq.doe.gov

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